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What is “Fashion”?

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*But seest thou not what a deformed thief this Fashion is?*

## I

THERE are few of us who cannot sympathise with that father of a family who wrote once to the Editor of a ladies' paper, begging him to announce that the fashionable bonnet *this* year would be one of *last* year's done up !

The tale may be apocryphal, but it indicates very completely the cost, the tyranny, and the uselessness of fashion. That fashion serves no useful end is indeed the confirmed opinion of a large number of thinking men and women. Called upon to define fashion, they will instantly show that what they understand by the term is a series of frequently recurring changes undetermined by utility. By this they do not mean to affirm that no change of fashion is ever *accompanied* by utility. They merely allege that it is not because a given new departure in dress or what not is *better* that people combine to bring it about, and there is therefore never any guarantee that there will not be a quick recurrence to the state of things upon which the new departure is an improvement.

It is this circumstance which puts a clear line of demarcation between the changes which go to make up Progress and those which constitute Fashion. There is no danger in a progressive country that stage coaches and horses should ever be substituted for railways and steam. But in a fashionable nation changes as retrogressive as these constantly take place (1).

It is this too which gives such precariousness to fashion-regulated industries.

To the producer a new fashion means a change in the wants of the consumers for whom he caters, and it is clear that he will lose or gain just in proportion as he is able to forestall approximately or adapt himself adequately to the changed demand.

But to be able to forecast the demands of the public is only possible if fashion can be reduced to law.

I should be loth to dogmatise, but I fancy the closest study of the history of fashion in the past would fail to evolve any such general laws as would guide the producer to profitable production. There is

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(1) Witness the odious farthingale revived for the third time as the crinoline.

no average time, for instance, during which a fashion maintains its ascendancy. In mediaeval days, some fashion might last 100 years, while another introduced contemporaneously flourished only thirty. The practice of patching, which began in the reign of Elizabeth, lasted right on into the Hanoverian reigns, reaching its climax, however, under Charles the First, when a young woman in a portrait of that day is shown with a coach and four on her brow, a round spot on her chin, a star on each cheek, and a crescent beneath the left eye. Pointed shoes, when they came in under the Valois kings, remained in one century.

Even when we turn to the origin of fashion we are not much helped.

### *THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS OF FASHION*

For the purpose of this paper it is scarcely necessary to trace with Herbert Spencer the genesis of fashion from the trophy to the badge and from the badge to the distinctive costume.

But his theory of fashion we may partially accept, and, if it does not sound too presumptuous to say so, slightly amend.

All fashion, he points out, is intrinsically imitative, the imitation springing from two widely divergent motives: (a) reverence for one imitated, or (b) desire to assert equality with him. The tendency to please rulers by avoiding any appearance of superiority to them is exemplified over and over again in the annals of courts. The modification of costume adopted by a monarch to hide some defect – a scar on his neck, or an ill-shaped leg - will be adopted by all his courtiers, and will spread downwards (2). Tolerance of this kind of imitation helped, says Spencer, to bring about the other kind by which it has been ultimately superseded (3).

For nowadays there is very little fashion which is due to reverential imitation. And even if there were, this would scarcely guide producers in determining the character of these products.

It might be easy to divine that if a member of the Royal Family suffering from a sprain limped slightly for some weeks, fatuous fools would at once simulate this limp, and that a shoemaker offering shoes to his customers with one heel higher than the other would reap the reward of his ingenuity.

But no producer, however far-seeing, could forecast the illness or accident which would lead to one member of a royal family limping or another having to have his head shaved, or a third getting engaged to a high-shouldered bride.

Reverential imitation, then, though an important factor in the

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(2) Full-bottomed wigs were introduced for the purpose of concealing the higher shoulder of a French Dauphin, and short hair on an occasion when Francis the First had to crop his head closely to allow of a wound being dressed.

(3) Ceremonial Institutions, chap. XI. p. 207.

past, may be put aside as affecting fashion, and what we have to consider is competitive imitation, and later on a factor of which Spencer takes no account, competitive differentiation.

### **COMPETITIVE IMITATION**

Competitive imitation, says Spencer, begins quite as early as the reverential.

Everywhere and always the tendency of the inferior to assert himself has been in antagonism with the restraints imposed on him; and a prevalent way of asserting himself has been to adopt costumes and appliances like those of his superior.

Competitive imitation, then, is imitation with a view to establishing in the eyes of the world that relation to those above one which one desires to claim. Those who are quite in the fashion are supposed to be people who from their wealth or position have early opportunities of seeing and adopting the modifications of dress and taste displayed by those highest up in the scale of rank and means.

Hence, the more rapidly they take on a new fashion, the more likely they are to be classed amongst the wealthy and the 'smart'.

Were we looking at the moral aspects of the matter, we should say this was all silly, disgusting, and hateful, but, as it is the industrial aspects which claim our attention, adjectives can be spared.

The style of dress worn by the wealthy and notable will be quickly adopted by all other classes, and the problem for the producer is to discover what determines the adoption in the first place by this comparatively small class of the given style.

### **DESIRE FOR DIFFERENTIATION**

*There is no doubt that the tendency on the part of inferiors to assimilate themselves to their superiors is always in conflict with a tendency on the part of superiors to differentiate themselves from inferiors (4).*

They cannot do this through the medium of sumptuary laws, they

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(4) When servants take to fringes, ladies put theirs back, and now, when every chimney-sweep is a gentleman, every chairwoman a lady, those who formerly figured under such titles prefer to be called men and women. Up to about the seventeenth century it was possible to tell everyone's position in society by his or her clothes, or even by their colours.

*'Oh, Bell my wiffe, why dost thou floute?*

*Now is nowe, and then was then;*

*Seeke now all the world throughout,*

*Thou ken'st not clownes from gentlemen ;*

*They are cladde in black, greene, yellowe, or graye,*

*Soe far above their owne degree'.*

*(Song, 'Take thy Old Cloake about thee.')*

Permission, however, was accorded to people to dress in a manner above their station if they wore garments given them by their superiors; cf. Montel (*Histoire des divers Etats*, VII. 7).

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cannot by pains and penalties prevent other people imitating them, but they can abandon a style when the imitation has spread very far downwards. This they do perpetually; hence that apparent demand for change as change which is always being deplored.

Thus the desire for novelty is no aesthetic one, springing out of an appreciation of contrast - a perpetual seeking after the ideally beautiful - it is simply due to a wish to assert oneself.

To follow fashion is to claim equality, but to be amongst those who initiate it is to assert absolute supremacy.

The cards from which are woven the materials for the court dress of a leader of fashion will be destroyed directly one dress length has been made. The Parisian model bonnet will be delivered to her before it has entered into commerce and has been copied in any milliner's work-room (5). Her desire, and that of her fellows, to wear something which the masses have not yet appropriated becomes then a prominent factor in producing the vagaries of fashion. And the only approach to anything like law in the matter will be this: *Changes dictated by a desire for differentiating oneself from the commonalty will be welcome just in proportion as they are extremely violent, and present innumerable difficulties to speedy imitation.*

It is the operation of this law which calls forth those leaps to extremes which have ever provoked the scorn of the satirist. Aesthetic influences, as concurrently determining factors, are not wholly absent, but they operate more to keep a fashion from going out than to bring a new one in. In fact, two conflicting tendencies are ever at work. On the one hand, in proportion as a fashion spreads down-wards it tends to go out. On the other hand, in proportion as it satisfies the desire for beauty, and is appropriate to the needs of the wearer, it tends to persist. In the unequal conflict between them, it is generally the first tendency which carries the day.

People imagine that aestheticism influences more than it does, because they see the whole civilised world ultimately displaying some style of beautiful dress first worn by a French actress. It has caught the popular taste by reason of its beauty, they suppose. As a matter of fact, people hasten to adopt the particular style because the French stage is one of the recognised channels by which new fashions are launched. No personal taste on the part of the actress may have gone to the assumption by her of this or that gown, and none need be

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(5) The leading dressmakers of modern times will invariably be those who can ensure their clients enjoying, for at least a month or so, a virtual monopoly of some style or fabric. Drapers, too, have to study this desire on the part of customers for things not likely to become hackneyed. 'I have been shown German printed calicoes', said a witness before the Commission on Depression of Trade, 'which have been sold in England by a large home-trade Manchester firm, simply because the ground-work was a slightly different shade of tobacco colour than the ground or padded work of Manchester printers. The shopkeepers *would have* the German stuff *because it was smaller in supply, and could not be obtained from British competitors*'.

exercised by the general public following in her wake. Their power of selection is strictly limited to deciding in favour of one rather than another of the toilettes exhibited by her, and, did all happen to be barbarous, extravagant, and disfiguring, one or other of them would still pass into the current fashions of the moment.

#### *FASHION NOT DUE TO IMITATION*

Some manifestations of fashion are not due to imitation at all, but to simultaneous *initiation*. Just as people without any conscious imitation of each other will, in going over a field (if haste be their only object), naturally take an almost identical line across it, till in process of time their steps wear out a footpath, so people on occasion will adopt some uniform fashion because they are affected in some uniform way.

Thus, the introduction of a given style of gown will inevitably lead to a general modification of other details of costume and surroundings.

Falke, in his *Deutsche Trachten und Modenwelt*, mentions that during the period of long wigs, the tulip, stiff and majestic, was the fashionable flower. When skirts are voluminous, full, and made bell-shaped by means of whalebone and hoops, people will naturally tend to give themselves balance, as it were, by making their heads as large as possible, and increasing the size of their sleeves. When long dresses are worn, fancy and elaborate petticoats will be displayed. The inadequacy of the Directory and Empire dresses as regards warmth would necessarily lead to mantillas and scarves ; and similarly, when a particular colour craze manifests itself in people's selection of wall papers, the dominant tints in carpets and hangings will tend to be in harmonious relation.

Here at least we should seem to be in touch with phenomena of fashion capable of being predicted. The element of uncertainty, however, is even here not to be got rid of. For instance, experience may have shown us that as sleeves become shorter gloves become longer, and we may assume that a manufacturer who, noting the tendency towards short sleeves, prepared betimes for the production of long gloves would be acting wisely. But lace mittens might conceivably meet the requirements of the case quite as well as lengthened gloves, and another manufacturer who successfully put lace mittens on the market might drive long gloves out of the field.

Then again, take the fashion for stained boards. Before the event who could tell whether this would result in an increased or diminished demand for carpets?

As a matter of fact it has resulted in a lessened production of English carpets and a great demand for Turkey and other foreign

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carpets, which, to meet the increased demands, are now made in much changed qualities and have 'admittedly lost much of the beauty of colouring and excellence of make which were formerly such general characteristics of Oriental carpets.'

## II

On the whole, fashion may be described as the element of uncertainty run wild, and it is in this light we must view it when considering its effect upon production.

Fashion's progress is marked by sudden transfers of prosperity from one class or locality to another class or locality, and the question is, Are such transfers advantageous to the country at large ?

There are plenty of people who will answer with an unhesitating 'yes.' They will say that if such transfers come with sufficient frequency, they tend to diffuse periods of exceptional prosperity over widely separated portions of the industrial field, so that in the course of every few years each group of workers engaged in the production of things which fashion affects will in turn have enjoyed some of this prosperity.

In this way industries will be given an opportunity of expanding to the point where they can avail themselves to the utmost of improved machinery, increased division of labour, and all that economy of manufacture consequent upon some utilisation of waste not till then profitable.

Then, when the wave of fashion recedes, the industry can devote itself to staple production, or will have secured a hold upon foreign markets; while, of those who have been benefited by the times of exceptionally active trade, many will manage to permanently retain the benefit by the judicious use they have made of higher wages and profits. In this manner most men will get that opportunity which is supposed to come to every one once in his life.

But there is a reverse side to the medal in the fact that every increase of prosperity secured to a class or locality by change of fashion involves a corresponding loss to some other class or locality. The hard times induced by waning fashion may deprive people not only of all the advantages they have gleaned from the exceptionally good times, but of all those also which steady trade had previously bestowed upon them.

Now, as far as the working classes are concerned, it may be taken as an axiom that to descend in the scale of comfort does infinitely more harm than to ascend does good, and that the intensity of the struggle to secure work when work is scarce carries wages far lower down than the keenness of competition to obtain hands when hands are few carries wages up.

***How LABOUR LOSES***

A few instances taken indiscriminately from the commercial history of our own and other countries will make this abundantly clear. In 1852 fashion in France substituted for cheap thread lace a sort of flowered gimp lace of silk and wool.

Wages went up from 5d. a day, the normal earnings of the lace-workers, to 3s. 4d. The time of prosperity, however, was fleeting, and, fashion veering round, the wages of the women dropped suddenly to 10d. and 1s. 3d. a day for highly skilled workers, and in 1862, according to Reybaud, to about 4d. a day for the ordinary worker. (Mark, that was 4d. against the 5d. which had been earned in the days of steady trade (6). In 1865 and 1868 a great impetus was given to the Venetian glass industry by the increasing demand for beads, particularly in London.

*A great extension of the manufacture took place, the demand for labour considerably exceeded its usual supply, and wages rose so high that all who could do so abandoned their habitual occupation for bead-making. A period of wonderful prosperity was followed by one of corresponding depression. The demand for Venetian beads ceased, and a large number of persons were thrown out of work. Shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, all who had been attracted to the bead manufacture by fancy wages, would have been glad to return to their former employment, but in many cases they found their places filled by new-comers.*

The trade societies did their best to relieve the distress, but there were still in August 1869 as many as 500 persons out of work in consequence of the crisis in the bead trade (7).

Similarly in 1880, when fashion showed a predilection for Brussels and Alençon lace and a distaste for Valenciennes, the peasant girls of Flanders who made this last kind of lace were reduced to miserably insufficient earnings, and endured the greatest privations (8).

The revived fashion for edelweiss lace was responsible, according to Mr. Mallet, President of the Nottingham Chamber of Commerce, for much of the depression which overtook the Nottingham lace trade a little while back. Similar lace, it is true, had been manufactured in Nottingham forty or fifty years previously, but it had gone so completely out of fashion that not a piece had been made for twenty-five or more years, and the needlewomen who used to make this lace had had to find some other employment (9).

In 1832 a crisis occurred in the English glove trade, which was ascribed partly to the admission of foreign gloves, but chiefly to the fashion for cotton 'Berlin' gloves.

Many of the distressed operatives, who had been earning from 20s. to 30s. a week, were reduced to stone-breaking and road-mending-men at 8d. a day, women

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(6) Cf. *Le Travail des Femmes* (Leroy Beaulieu).

(7) *Report on the Condition of Industrial Classes*, 1871, lxviii.

(8) Cf. *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. xlii. 1880.

(9) Cf. *Report of the Commission on Depression in Trade and Industry*.



at 4d.—while some of those deprived of their customary means of livelihood went on the rates.

Again, fashion in 1862 ruined the sewed muslin trade in the North of Ireland. It was stated at the time in a memorial presented to the Queen, that in 1856 there had been employed in this delicate and beautiful branch of industry no fewer than 200,000 women in Ireland and 25,000 in Scotland, the wages of those employed in embroidery alone amounting to 480,300 l. annually. In 1861 the sum total paid to labour employed in the various details of the manufacture had gone down to 200,000 l., as against 700,000 l. so paid in 1856.

### III

A North of England cloth manufacturer (10), questioned lately about the effects of fashion on the producing classes, wrote as follows: -

I will speak of experiences of my own. One I give is typical of what goes on in the fashion industries. Within half a mile of this place is a large mill, whose proprietor, an ingenious but entirely ignorant man, had successfully imitated with silk, waste, or mohair, or something else, a sealskin. Now, as this article is very expensive, large numbers of foolish people, unable to purchase the real thing but very anxious to follow the fashion and be thought well of, purchased these goods in such quantities that this man got together a considerable fortune in a few years. *He also got together a large number of workers from other industries*, which, though steadier, did not yield quite as much wage. There was no secret in the production, hence other manufacturers entered into competition and prices were run down. This would not matter; but the public, no longer satisfied with the imitation seal, won't have it at any price, the consequence being that the works are closed, and the *workmen's cottages stand empty*.

#### ***DIFFICULTY OF TAKING UP EVEN ALLIED EMPLOYMENT***

It is all very well to talk glibly of the ultimate adaptation of labour to altered conditions of demand, but the adaptation is imperfect, even when fashion refrains from deserting an industry altogether, and only singles out a special branch for its capricious favour. It is undoubtedly easier for a maker of Valenciennes lace to take to the making of Brussels lace than it would be for a housemaid or a nail and chain maker. The kid-glove machinists could turn more easily to the Astrachan branch of the glove trade than the maker of lace mitts to gloving. Costume hands can go in for mantle work with less effort than could the artificial florists.

But though this sort of adaptation is easier it is *not easy*. The process of adaptation - *i.e.* taking up the work which is most in demand and most like one's own - requires time; and time is just what fashion does not grant. The adaptation painfully and laboriously effected, away it flits, leaving behind the stern necessity for a fresh adaptation.

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(10) Mr. George Thompson, of Woodhouse Mills, Huddersfield.

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When one realises all the physical and mental suffering involved in being out of work, one can understand why Ben Tillet and Tom Mann are found urging the recognition of some kind of communal responsibility, making provision for those who are dislodged from their ordinary occupations by changes of fashion. To do away with the tyranny of fashion would, however, be the more desirable consummation.

#### *DEAD SEASON AND OVERTIME*

Irregularity of work – that is to say, periods of exhausting and excessive toil alternating with periods of demoralising and profitless idleness – must also be laid to the account of fashion's variations.

Said Mr. Jonathan Peate, giving evidence before the Labour Commission:–

The fickleness of taste and the perpetual occurrence of new demands which cannot be foreseen have made it impossible to distribute the work more easily. The demand for certain classes of goods at fixed periods has ceased altogether. It is now only safe to manufacture to order. To create a stock of goods is most foolhardy.

#### *FASHION MAKES COMMODITIES DEARER*

But it may be urged that the displacement of labour which so invariably accompanies sudden changes of fashion must not be held to justify us in condemning fashion, since inventions which no sensible person would wish to check are attended in their first stages by precisely the same phenomenon.

Inventions, however, increase the sum total of production, fashion does not. It simply changes the proportion in which the constituents of the sum total of production stand to each other. Inventions cheapen, fashion makes things dearer.

True, as Roscher points out, the vast demand which fashion brings into play is favourable to enterprise on a large scale and to all the economy in production which the factory system entails. But, on the other hand, fashion and its caprices have to be reckoned with, and the whole advantage of economy in production may be swallowed up by the vicissitudes which attend the getting off of the finished products.

*All the probable loss incidental on an adverse change of fashion has to be allowed for (not only by the producer, but by the distributor) in the price of the product.* If goods are heavy – that is to say, do not commend themselves to the buyers of large firms – manufacturers are put to the greatest straits to minimise their loss.

Sudden changes of fashion (writes a partner in the great Saltaire alpaca manufacture) are, as you may imagine, a source of annoyance to all manufacturers, and, in cases where the raw material already provided, or the goods already made

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do not in any way meet the new requirements, or the machinery already in hand is not adapted to the new fashions, then there is an almost inevitable loss.

Asked further how big firms strove to avert such loss, he answered:

We have not, as you may surmise, quite the same remedy as have the large retail houses with their winter and summer sales. When change of fashion has thrown on our hands a lot of raw material we, in some cases, sell it in that state, if we can see our way to do so without great loss; in other cases we work up the material mixed with other wools, or substitute another kind of warp, or alter the make of the cloth or the style of finish, so as to approximate as near as possible to the exigencies of the moment. In other words, we do the best we can in each individual case.

But sometimes no best is possible. When the Princess May's engagement to the Duke of Clarence was first announced, manufacturers at once set to work to introduce May blossom into all their season materials. Large quantities of mousselines de laine and brocades were brought out, with a pattern of white May running over them. The sad death of the Prince gave an ill-omened character to such goods, and it taxed all the resources of the dealers to dispose of them.

#### *DIFFICULTY OF MINIMISING LOSS*

Now in cases of this kind, where the value of goods is partially destroyed without the goods themselves suffering the least change of form, attempts are often made to foist them on the provinces. In Paris there are houses which buy up everything as it begins to go out of fashion, and then send it into the provinces and to foreign parts (11). But, as I was assured by a courteous representative of Messrs. Debenham's firm, this mode of minimising loss is less effectual than it was. Fashion papers, to say nothing of detailed journalistic descriptions of the toilettes of fashionable personages, keep provincials wide awake. Australia, it is true, takes after-season goods (their midwinter being the time of our midsummer), but she will accept nothing that has not gone off well here. If the price of goods did not on the whole cover these inevitable losses occasioned by fashion, it would cease to be profitable to manufacture.

In the same way the retailer, in fixing his price, has to cover the contingency of having to sell off his unsold stocks at those winter and summer sales which of late years have become such a feature in retail transactions (12). The first loss is the least loss is the

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(11) Principles of Political Economy (Roscher), vol. ii. 188.

(12) The sales are ceasing to answer their purpose of carrying off surplus stocks in proportion as the circumstances of modern industry make it more vital for the merchant to get rid of them. Purchasers prefer to pay more for goods, or buy inferior qualities and be in the fashion.

experience of firms like Debenham's, Marshall and Snelgrove's, &c., and they will not pay rent for unsaleable articles, but clear off things at any sacrifice.

### *THE PATTERN SYSTEM*

The immense development of the pattern-publishing system, rendering it easy for the public to successfully assimilate new fashion in about the space of six months, is another cause which makes for instability. Butterick's patterns circulate hugely in America, England, and the Colonies, this firm having 175 agencies, mostly amongst drapers, and an organ with a monthly circulation of 500,000. At first the policy of the firm was simply to follow fashion, but now it is endeavouring to lead fashion, and it is barely possible that within certain limits it will realise this ambition. When it does, however, fashion will tend to become more stable again, the differentiating impulse being forced then to find its satisfaction in excellence of quality rather than in any originality of style.

### *FASHION'S REVERSIONERS*

Many people try to show that if the operation of fashion enhances for one set of purchasers the prices of all goods subject to fluctuations through fashion, it at the same time lowers the price of these goods at a subsequent period for another class of purchasers. Goods are bought at sales at prices out of all proportion to their original cost, so those who buy them must gain.

This, however, is a very debateable point. Every woman's experience tells her that dresses and stuffs are bought on these occasions simply because they are cheap, and not because the purchaser really needs them. Now, it was a wise saying of our grandmothers, that 'however little you may pay for a thing, if you don't want it, it is always dear.'

Again, though poor relations and needy hangers-on may obtain the reversion of garments of a cut and quality far superior to those which their own means would purchase, we must set against this gain the loss which they in their turn suffer when they too have to discard what fashion no longer allows even them to wear. So true is it that 'the fashion wears out more apparel than the man.'

Unless we are prepared to say that every change in the distribution of wealth, no matter how brought about, is admirable, we must concede that the cheapening of goods through their going out of fashion is no more an advantage to the country than is the cheapening of works of art during a time of commercial depression. Some individuals gain what other individuals lose, but the nation is not benefited. Indeed, if the depression be continued long enough to check artistic effort it loses.

***DOES FASHION STIMULATE AND ELEVATE PRODUCTION?***

Not content with denying that fashion means *loss* to the community, there are individuals who will boldly declare that it means gain.

Milliners, dressmakers, tailors, haberdashers, florists, hairdressers, &c. – retail firms generally dealing in fashion-regulated commodities – unite in saying that fashion is the very life of trade. They will tell you that the power to produce is more than production, and that it is this power which fashion fosters. They will add that through fashion are evolved various qualities economically valuable to the community – versatility, ingenuity, skill, resource, taste, and I know not what beside (13). There is a measure of truth in this, but the necessity of evolving these qualities in this one way is not so apparent.

As Mrs. Bryant (B.Sc.) pointed out when the subject was recently under discussion: -

Any advantages of this kind secured by change of fashion or *variation of style in time* could be secured in much greater degree and with better artistic effect in consumption by more *variety of style in space*, each woman trying to wear that which suited her best. If a more serious attempt at genuine artistic effect in dress were made by us all, dress would be much more closely adapted to individual variation of physique, and this would create at all times a great demand on the inventive powers of those engaged in the manufacture of dress.

Apart from any realisation of Mrs. Bryant's ideal, however, I am of opinion that the ordinary and natural changes caused by seasonal fluctuations, national catastrophes, new inventions, and general progress, would suffice to develop and utilise all the versatility and alertness necessary for staple production on the best lines (14).

I incline to the belief that fashion does not so much develop these qualities in the nation at large as it does in a limited number of individuals.

Professor Marshall's ideal manufacturer, we know (if he makes goods not to meet special orders but for the general market), must combine in his one person all the qualities needful for an organiser of labour – a natural leader of men – with all those other qualities which are essential to a merchant, to a caterer for the public. Thanks to the ceaseless changes of fashion, a tendency is exhibiting itself to separate more and more these functions, and to evolve a class of men who are not necessarily capable of organising labour at all, but who, as Professor Marshall puts it, have a power of forecasting the broad movements of production and consumption.

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(13) Against this we must balance the absolute waste involved in the demonetisation, so to speak, of skill acquired by long-continued exercise in a given direction. A tailor lamented to me that hardly had he left off spoiling material and learnt how to cut out a lady's long jacket bodice than these bodices ceased to be fashionable and his new skill became useless.

(14) Sateen was brought out during a period of national depression, and much lessened the general distress at Preston.

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To such men, fashion is fruitful in opportunities. Like all experts, however, they justify their existence by artificially multiplying the occasions for their services, and, not content with successfully feeling the pulse of popular caprice, they set themselves to make it beat as they themselves determine. They no longer forecast, they to a certain extent create fashion. Bitter are the complaints brought by manufacturers against these men.

‘Their existence depends upon fomenting discontent in the minds of the purchaser,’ says one manufacturer. He himself will leave to the competitive manufacturer the ‘pandering to the cupidity of merchants and tailors’.

This class of experts, who begin by being buyers and end by being powers, do for fashions what Reuter's Telegraph Agency does for news. All the fabrics and designs of pre-eminent manufacturers and *artistes en modes* got ready for the coming season are communicated to other manufacturers, who proceed to reproduce them in cheaper form for a lower stratum of consumer.

#### ***GROWING INSTABILITY OF FASHION***

The existence of the class already alluded to is one of the circumstances which must tend to make fashion ever less and less stable.

But another cause tending to increase the changes of fashion is the immense cheapening of all products consumed by the masses. As Roscher points out, fashion was still relatively stable in the Middle Ages because articles of wearing apparel were proportionately dearer than they are to-day. Joinville wore a garment bequeathed to him by his father and mother; and in Persia shawls are frequently inherited through many generations.

Fashion, indeed, never gets the same hold upon luxuries of a very costly kind. Take Cashmere shawls, for instance, where one of the finer sorts will employ the labour of three men for a whole year. Look again at carpets. Really good reproductions from the best Oriental sources, viz. original rugs and carpets, most of them centuries old, are subject to few fluctuations in demand. For the same reason, sealskin jackets change their shape less frequently than cloth.

Fashion nowadays affects those things most which by reason of their price are within the reach of the largest numbers. In this connection the influence of the *sewing machine* must not be over-looked. This has increased immeasurably the instability of fashion. Before cheap stuffs were not worth making up, but, the labour of sewing having been lessened, cheap fabrics are in constant demand.

#### ***SUMMARY***

There is nothing elevated or laudable in the psychological basis of fashion which can compensate for the evils accompanying its pro-

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(15) Cf. Quicherat, *Histoire du Costume*.

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gress. Fashion is just the outcome of an ignoble desire to flaunt (real or simulated) superiority in the eyes of the world. Fashionable people are even more anxious nowadays to be *unlike* those they consider beneath them than to be like those they consider above them. The more modern civilisation enables the imitating many to quickly assimilate the garb and customs of the differentiating few, the more frequent must the changes of fashion be, till at length the very extent of the evil calls forth a remedy.

It is possible this remedy may be on the lines of Mrs. Bryant's suggestion. Or it may be a national, if not an international, garb will be evolved, which will get stereotyped like the coat, trousers, and high hat of the nineteenth-century man. It must be remembered that until the fourteenth century men were even more the slaves of fashion than women, and many a Claudio would lie 'ten nights awake carving the fashion of a new doublet'(16).

But whether reforms are possible or not, the first step towards reform is a clear vision of things as they are. It is impossible to maintain that aesthetics have much to do with fashion. It is impossible likewise to cheat ourselves into believing that incessantly changing fashions are good for trade. So far as the working classes are concerned, the displacement of labour induced by waning fashion does them more harm than increased employment due to developing fashion does good. As to manufacturers, they are hampered in their operations, production becoming more speculative every day. As to consumers, they have to pay higher prices for all products subject to fashion's influence, while the diversion of their time and thought to trivial matters of dress is also an economic loss to the community. The only gainers are a limited class of experts and dealers. All the economically valuable qualities said to be developed by the necessity fashion imposes of 'keeping on the alert' can be developed by the ordinary and inevitable crisis through which staple production passes, and could be better secured by a greater variety in dress at any given time.

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(16) Cf. Miss Hill, History of British Costume.

ADA HEATHER BIGG.